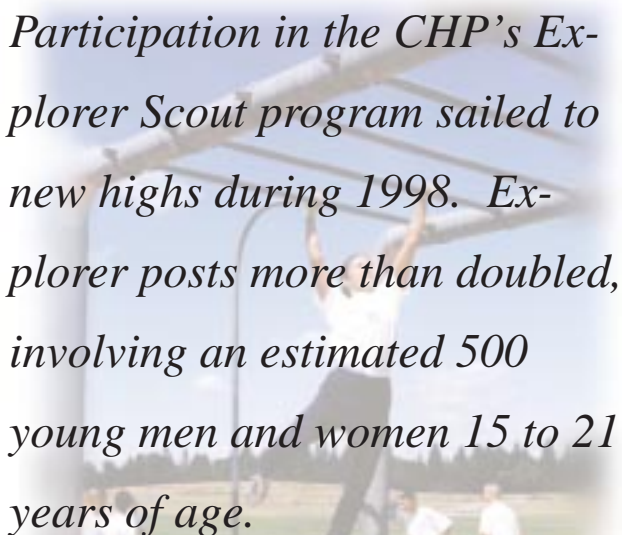


Explorers Try Out Law Enforcement Careers



Participation in the CHP's Explorer Scout program sailed to new highs during 1998. Explorer posts more than doubled, involving an estimated 500 young men and women 15 to 21 years of age.

The expansion resulted from the Department's increased emphasis on the program, which gives youths an inside view of law enforcement.

Young people receive extensive training through a four-level program which gives them skills to direct traffic, take reports, provide help at crash scenes, assist in dispatch, and set up and take down DUI checkpoints, among many other duties.

Ride-alongs give them first-hand experience in the operation of the Department.

The importance of the Explorer program was underscored in 1998 when the Department convened a task force to examine and revamp the entire program.

The program has twin goals: recruit officers for the CHP and provide a service to the community.

"It's a recruitment tool, yes. But even if the explorers don't choose the CHP, they become adults with a deep appreciation of what law enforcement is all about," said Officer Don Woelke.

Quick Facts about CHP Explorers

35 Explorer posts
500 participants
93 percent of Explorers who attend
CHP Academy graduate

An officer in the Needles Area office, Woelke has been an Explorer advisor for nine years and has seen 40 young people go through the Explorer program from his small community.

"The activities offered by the Explorer program depend on the local Area office," Woelke said. His program in Needles trains youths in disaster preparedness, bicycle safety, theft prevention and traffic control. It sponsored a paint-up, fix-up program for senior citizens.

Explorers in the Monterey and San Francisco Bay areas provide traffic control for large entertainment venues such as Laguna Seca and Sears Point raceways. Traffic originally was handled by local law enforcement, but the well-trained Explorers have freed those agencies for other duties. At the same time, the post earns money for its activities.

Explorer posts have become so active nationwide they hold annual competitions. Woelke's post in Needles sponsors one of the best-known, a four-day April event that attracts 1,200 to 1,600 youths from across the nation who compete for trophies in athletic ability and law enforcement skills.

Officer Ken Wallace, Explorer advisor in the West Valley Area office near Los Angeles, said the Explorers often are high school graduates looking to the future. “They join when they get out of high school because they’re starting to think, what am I going to do with my life?”

One young man became an Explorer after he saw a poster in the Area office while he was getting a ticket signed off, Wallace said.

For those who continue their training as cadets at the CHP Academy, 93 percent graduate, compared to about 80 percent of non-Explorer cadets. In addition to the young people who join the CHP, many others join police or sheriff’s offices as law enforcement officers.

Whether or not the young people decide to become officers, the program yields substantial benefits. “We provide a positive role model. They talk about stuff they wouldn’t talk to their parents about,” said Wallace.



Kids in Explorers Stay Out of Trouble

Not a lot happens in a small town. That’s one reason why Heather Dixon joined the Explorers.

She is a sophomore in high school in the town of Esparto in Yolo County. “Out here, a lot of kids go in the wrong direction when they get into high school,” said Dixon, who joined the program a year ago. She was recruited by her Explorer advisor at the Woodland Area, Officer Reid Thompson, whom she had known most of her life.



EXPLORER
SCOUT
HEATHER
DIXON with
Officer Reid
Thompson,
1998 Yolo
County Fair.

◀ EXPLORER SCOUT MAYOLO BANUELOS carries an injured child from a two-car collision on Highway 132 near Modesto that killed four and injured five others.
(Modesto Bee Photo by Adrian Mendoza)